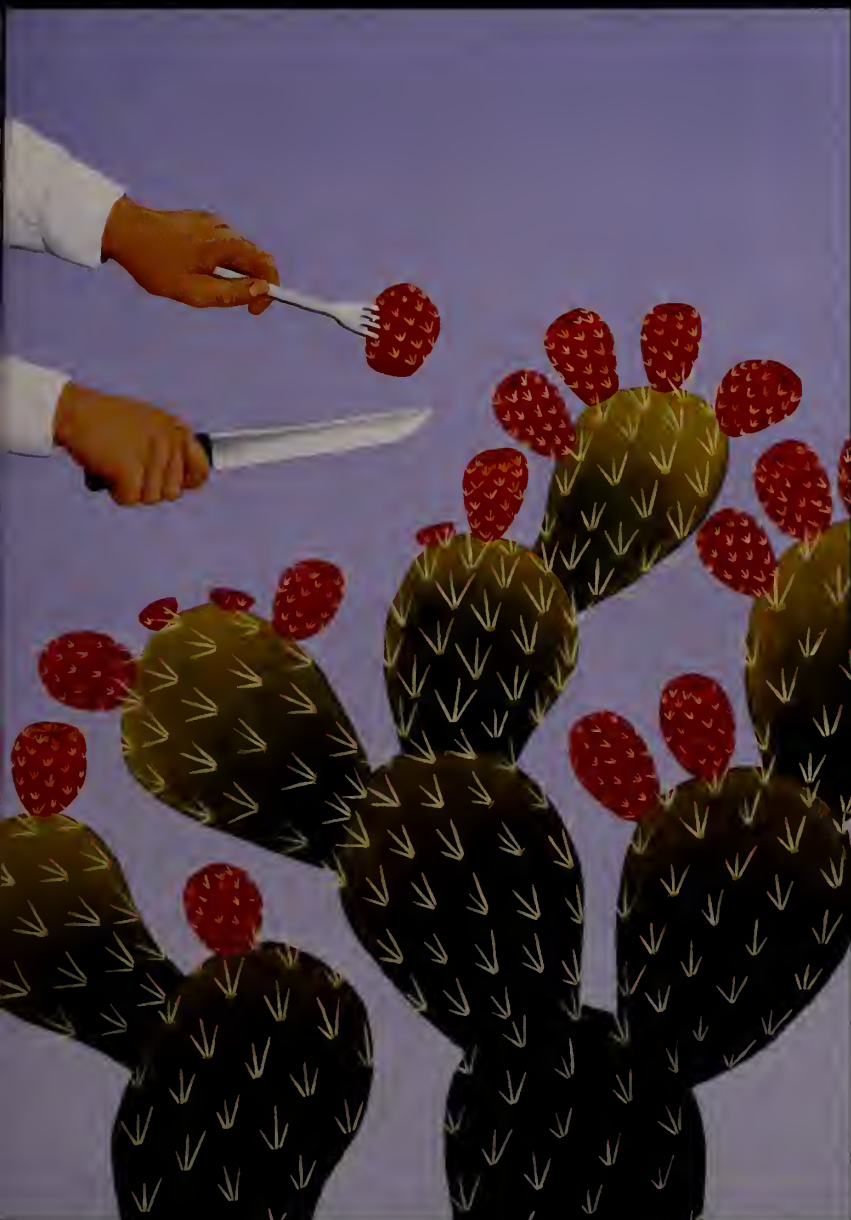
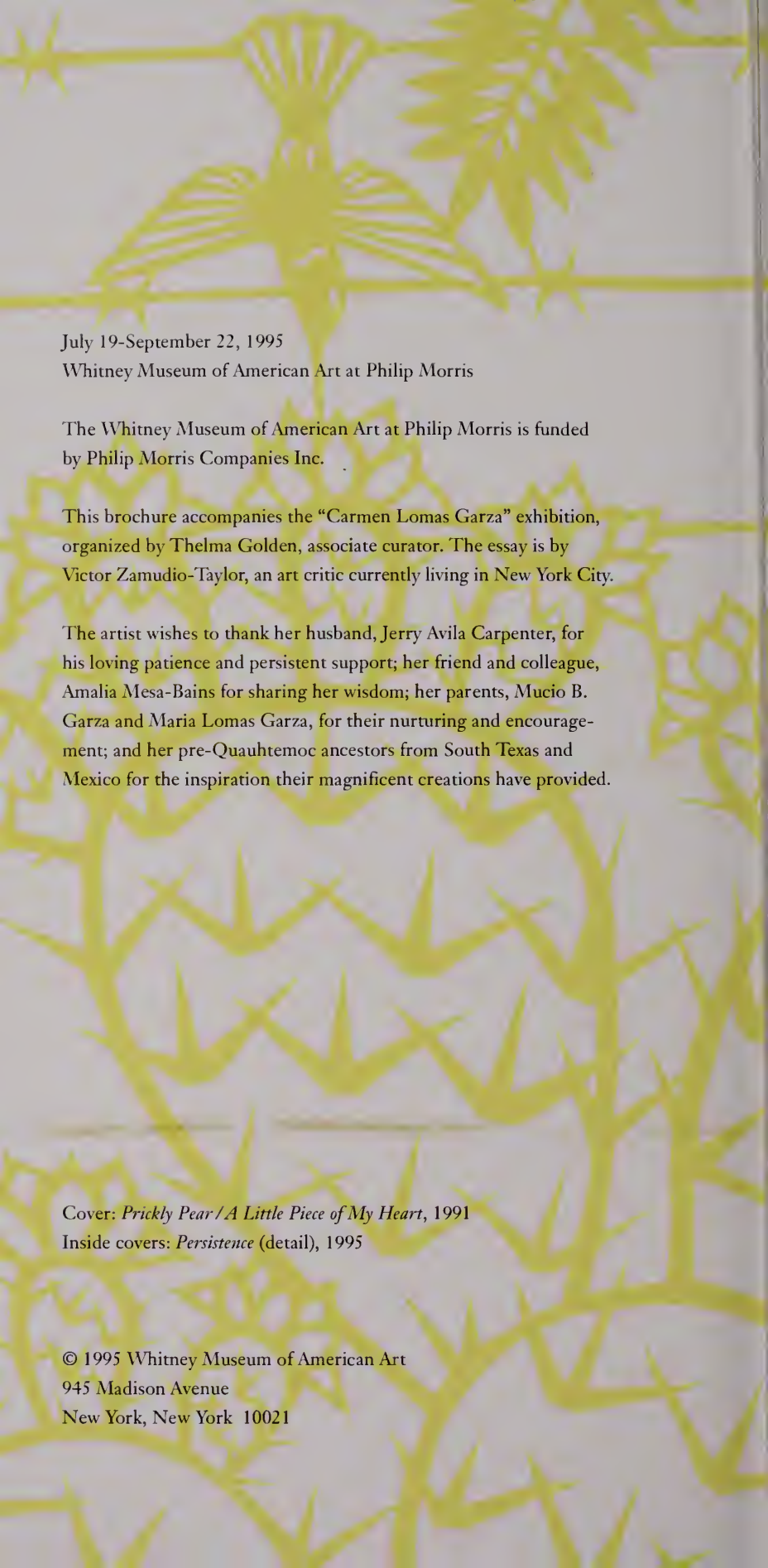


CARMEN LOMAS GARZA





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Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris

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This brochure accompanies the "Carmen Lomas Garza" exhibition, organized by Thelma Golden, associate curator. The essay is by Victor Zamudio-Taylor, an art critic currently living in New York City.

The artist wishes to thank her husband, Jerry Avila Carpenter, for his loving patience and persistent support; her friend and colleague, Amalia Mesa-Bains for sharing her wisdom; her parents, Mucio B. Garza and Maria Lomas Garza, for their nurturing and encouragement; and her pre-Quauhtemoc ancestors from South Texas and Mexico for the inspiration their magnificent creations have provided.

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Cover: *Prickly Pear / A Little Piece of My Heart*, 1991

Inside covers: *Persistence* (detail), 1995

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945 Madison Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

# CARMEN LOMAS GARZA

by Victor Zamudio Taylor

Contemporary Chicanas/os are descendants of Mexicans who opted to stay in lands north of the United States-Mexico border as demarcated in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe, when Mexico ceded more than half its territory to the United States. With the treaty, Mexicans became Mexican-Americans, and to a lesser or greater degree, second-class citizens in the regions they had known, in some cases, for more than two and a half centuries. Joined by Mexicans who have migrated north over the years, Chicanos now form the largest Latino-American group.

Chicano culture is characterized by a tenacious will to affirm, resist, and survive. The experience of annexation, internal colonialism, migration, and forced relocation has fashioned a culture grounded in translation and changing spatialities. Translation has allowed Chicano culture to operate in many registers and in between Mexican and American traditions.

Chicano artistic practices nurtured continuity and tradition through alternate narratives of the self and community at large. These include the *corrido* (historic ballads); the tales and myths of the oral mode; popular and religious theater; the altar and the *ofrenda* (offering) for the Day of the Dead; and family and community rites of passage and celebrations. Chicano practices of self-representation share the centrality of memory, which is both a defining and a defiant aspect of Chicano art. In opposition to a history and the construction of univocal narratives that blur and erase, Chicano art has expressed and forged different versions and visions of the Chicana/o experience. At times, when the horizon of hope



*Para la Cena (For Dinner)*, 1986

has promised little, self-representations have provided humor along with a different sense of history, which combine to make the present livable and the future potentially better.

Carmen Lomas Garza is an artist whose work powerfully expresses the Chicana/o experience. Through the deployment of memory, she creates a visual language that narrates Chicana/o rural life. Celebrations, myths, healing ceremonies, family stories, and everyday life are visually rendered in the framework of tradition and innovation. Working in the tradition of the chronicler, Lomas Garza recollects and recasts reminiscences in a visual narrative. The chronicle of things past is grounded in the polyphony of ballads, tales, myths, and *chisme* (gossip) that make up the oral tradition. Lomas Garza reworks shared images, signs, and metaphors through anecdote, a device that invites the viewer to enter the marvels of her pictorial language. In *Abuelitos Piscando Nopalitos* (*Grandparents Cutting Cactus*) (1980), Lomas Garza's *monitos* (doll-like figures) harvest a poor yet delectable delicacy cherished since Pre-Columbian times. Three generations of rural Tejanos (Chicano Texans), participate in a seasonal and family ritual. *Nopalitos* (cacti), apart from their place in the





*El Milagro (The Miracle)*, 1987

Chicano culinary tradition, are also symbols of the greatness and adversity of life; if not cut and handled with care, they prick. Also pictured is a barbed wire fence dividing the arid landscape, which has been opened to allow the family to cross and cut the cacti. This division mirrors the geo-historical as well as spiritual experience; it is a sign that triggers diverse layers of signification, from imposed borders that divide families and demarcate the usurpation of land to contemporary reclamations of place.

Lomas Garza's *monitos*, as well as her insistence on narrative, have led many to categorize her work as "naive." While inspired by the tradition of popular votive and folk painting, Lomas Garza chooses to work with a figuration that creates a polysemous visual language centered on storytelling. The miniaturized world of the *monitos* is an uncanny one. In *Para la Cena (For Dinner)* (1986), a familiar event has sinister dimensions. The preparation of the family meal, involving the killing of poultry, becomes very disquieting. Feathers fly in all directions; as the mother administers the final *coup de grace*, the father ritually readies another bird. The children sip their *raspados* (ice cones), whose drips

become an allegory for blood. The simultaneous actions of parents and children are compounded through the magnification of detail, which conjures up diverse narrative possibilities. Similar devices operate in *El Milagro (The Miracle)* (1987), which depicts the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe on a water tank. Families gather out of devotion and curiosity to see the miraculous outline of the Chicano and Mexican patron saint. Hung alongside floral offerings to the “little brown one,” as she is affectionately called, are three snakes bleeding from the mortal wounds inflicted by two rifle-bearing Tejanos. Lomas Garza, depicted as a little girl in the painting (she wears a blue and white dress), evokes a sense of wonder and the mystery of a “marvelous real” world, as scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto has observed.<sup>1</sup>

Chicano expressions of devotion, healing, and recovery are represented in Lomas Garza’s work as part of a complex way of knowing and transforming a given reality. In *Curandera (Faith Healer)* (1989), as in most of her works, women are at the center. A healer cures another woman through the power of a psychosomatic cleansing and the aroma of *copal* (a resin incense). It is a universe mastered by Chicanas in order to nurture, recover, and celebrate difference. The dislocation of spatiality is made cohesive by signs and metaphors gliding around the crossroads of gender and culture. The sewing machine next to the home altar triggers chains of associations with the weaving and stitching of family memories into diverse textures and textualities. A statue of Don Pedro Jaramillo, a popular faith healer from the southwest who used water to cure, sits next to an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe; candles, flowers, and a photo of a man in uniform anchor the accumulative narrative of the home shrine. As artist and educator Amalia Mesa-Bains has noted, there is a visuality organized around pedagogy and representation: “Through the instructive gaze of Lomas



*Las Pachucas, Razor Blade 'do, 1993*

Garza women assert a locus of control and become central to the action of the painting....These women...are engaged in labor, teaching, healing, cooking and nurturing. There is no patriarchy positioning the women in these works.”<sup>2</sup>

Experience, its recollection and imagery, originates and revolves around relations of gender and culture. The past, woven into a visual narrative, expresses a bittersweet Chicana experience within and outside the culture. For Chicanas, domestic life is a source of sustenance and resistance as well as oppression; it has historically been the location of language, from which tradition and difference are enunciated. Aesthetically, as Mesa-Bains has underlined, “the roles of women, the questioning of gender relations and the opening of the domestic space have all been part of the art of Chicanas.”<sup>3</sup>

Tradition, both its marvels and confines, is what has fashioned the materiality of an identity in flux and open to questioning. As cultural critic bell hooks has argued, there are marginalities that one does not desire “to lose, to give up, or surrender as part of moving into the center, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s



*Curandera (Faith Healer)*, 1989

capacity to resist.”<sup>4</sup> Outside the nurturing space of the domestic site lies a prejudiced world. It is the world that disciplines difference; many Chicanas/os, until recently, have been punished for speaking Spanish. In *Las Pachucas*, *Razor Blade 'do* (1993) style and self-protection are related. The *pachucas*, defiant homegirls, protected all other Chicanas from Anglo aggression. With razor blades carefully arranged in their coiffure, they prepare to confront and defend themselves from the outside world. Pain is also overcome through self-deprecating humor in *Polvo y Pelo*, *El Pleito (Dust and Hair, the Fight)* (1987). Two Chicanas quarrel and pull each other's hair in a vignette resounding of slapstick, yet here the world is not theater. In both paintings, the women are independent and empowered in their defenses and offenses, respectively, a presentation that undermines sexist stereotypes of both Anglo and Chicano cultures.

Inspired by the still-life genre paintings of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, Lomas Garza celebrates the surprises that life offers. Like her predecessor, she reconfigures the genre. Succulent slices of fruit, the color of blood, drip their juices on a plate in *Sandía / Pedacito de mi Corazón*



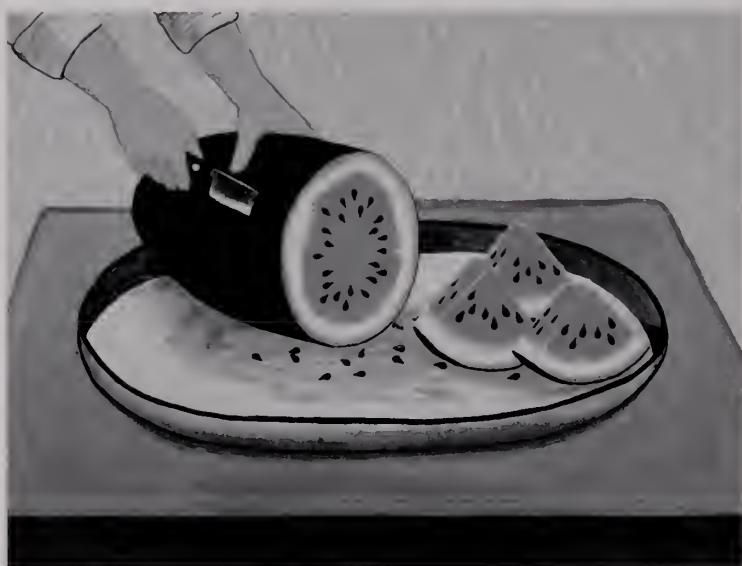


*Polvo y Pelo, El Pleito (Dust and Hair, the Fight), 1987*

*(Watermelon / Little Piece of My Heart) (1986).* The still-life as dead nature comes alive in the metaphorical association of the fruit and life-sustaining organ. The heart is the essence of life and, as in the Aztec cosmology, the location of memory. *Sandía* is a representation charged with allegorical impulses: the fruit is heart; both are passion and involve sacrifice and giving. The theme is *vanitas*, the futile passage and fugacity of life. The iconography asks us to meditate on the tyranny of temporality, on life, its meaning and values. The aesthetic stance is hybrid: the European tradition and the Pre-Columbian universe are transformed and translated to a most concrete present. Lomas Garza expresses an experience through her art that is enunciated from the heart and the heartbeat of a culture. In her own words, "We have been doing Chicano art not only for Chicanos but also for *others* to see who we are as a people. If you see my heart and humanity through my art then hopefully you will not exclude me from rightfully participating in this society .... And now I give you a little piece of my heart in my art."<sup>5</sup>

# NOTES

1. See the discussion in Tomás Ybarra-Frausto and Terecita Romo, *Carmen Lomas Garza: Lo Real Maravilloso, The Marvelous / The Real*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: The Mexican Museum, 1987).
2. Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Chicano Chronicle and Cosmology: The Works of Carmen Lomas Garza," in *A Piece of My Heart / Pedacito de mi Corazón: The Art of Carmen Lomas Garza*, exh. cat. (Austin, Texas: Laguna Gloria Art Museum, 1991), p. 22.
3. Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Art of the Other México: Sources and Meanings," exh. cat. (Chicago: Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, 1993), p. 58.
4. bell hooks, "marginality as site of resistance," in Russel Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West, eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1990), p. 341.
5. Lomas Garza, in *Pedacito de mi Corazón*, p. 13.



*Sandía/Pedacito de mi Corazón (Watermelon / Little Piece of My Heart)*, 1986

## CARMEN LOMAS GARZA

Born in Kingsville, Texas, 1948

Texas Arts and Industry University, Kingsville, Texas

(BS and Texas Teaching Certification, 1972)

Juarez-Lincoln/Antioch Graduate School, Austin, Texas (M. Ed., 1973)

San Francisco State University (MA, 1980)

Lives in San Francisco

## EXHIBITION HISTORY

### Selected One-Artist Exhibitions

1972

Estudios Rio Gallery, Mission,  
Texas, "Monitos"

1977

The Mexican Museum,  
San Francisco,  
"Carmen Lomas Garza"

1980

San Francisco Museum of  
Modern Art, "Carmen Lomas  
Garza: Prints and Gouaches"  
(catalogue, with second  
exhibition, "Margo Humphrey:  
Monotypes")

1981

Gallery Seven at Bon Marche,  
Eastern Washington University,  
Spokane, "Carmen Lomas  
Garza: Prints and Gouaches"

1985

Galería Posada,  
Sacramento, California,  
"Carmen Lomas Garza"

1987

The Mexican Museum,  
San Francisco,  
"Lo Real Maravilloso,  
The Marvelous/The Real"

1988

MARS Artspace, Phoenix,  
Arizona, "Carmen Lomas Garza"

1989

Galería sin Fronteras, Austin,  
Texas, "Carmen Lomas Garza"

1991

Laguna Gloria Art Museum,  
Austin, Texas, "Pecadito de mi  
Corazón" (catalogue; traveled)

Galería sin Fronteras, Austin,  
Texas, "Carmen Lomas Garza:  
The Old & the New"

1992

Smith College Museum of Art,  
Northampton, Massachusetts,  
"Homenaje a Tenochtitlán:  
An Installation for the Day  
of the Dead"

1993

Terrain Gallery, San Francisco,  
"Carmen Lomas Garza: Works"

1994

Honolulu Academy of Art,  
Hawaii, "Día de los muertos/  
Ofrenda para Antonio Lomas"

1995

Millicent Rogers Museum,  
Taos, New Mexico, "Los primos  
del Rio Abajo"

### Selected Group Exhibitions

1990

Wight Art Gallery, University  
of California, Los Angeles,  
"Chicano Art: Resistance and  
Affirmation, 1965-1985"  
(catalogue; traveled)

1993

Mexican Fine Arts Center  
Museum, Chicago, "The Art of  
the Other México: Sources and  
Meanings" (catalogue; traveled)

1992

The Mexican Museum,  
San Francisco, "The Chicano  
Codices: Encountering  
Art of the Americas"  
(catalogue; traveled)



*Autoretrato (Self-Portrait), 1980*



## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width.

*Abuelitos Piscando Nopalitos (Grandparents Cutting Cactus)*, 1980

Gouache on paper, 11 x 14

Collection of Richard L. Bains and Amalia Mesa-Bains

*Autoretrato (Self-Portrait)*, 1980

Gouache on paper, 8 1/2 x 7 1/2

Collection of the artist

*Camas para Sueños (Beds for Dreams)*, 1985

Gouache on paper, 23 x 17 1/2

Collection of the artist

*Para la Cena (For Dinner)*, 1986

Oil on linen mounted on wood, 24 x 32

El Paso Museum of Art, Texas; Robert U. and Mabel O. Lipscomb

Foundation Endowment Purchase

*Sandía/Pedacito de mi Corazón*

*(Watermelon / Little Piece of My Heart)*, 1986

Gouache on paper, 11 1/2 x 15

Collection of Gerald W. Carpenter

*El Milagro (The Miracle)*, 1987

Oil on canvas, 36 x 48

Nicolas and Cristina Hernández Trust Collection, Pasadena,  
California

*Polvo y Pelo, El Pleito (Dust and Hair, the Fight)*, 1987

Gouache on paper, 20 x 28

Collection of Pamela and Martin Krasney

*Posada (Inn)*, 1987

Gouache on paper, 20 x 28

Collection of Marina D. Alvarado and Gilbert Mercado, Jr.

*Tamalada (Making Tamales)*, 1987

Gouache on paper, 20 x 27

Don Ramon's Restaurant, San Francisco

*Cascarones (Easter Eggs)*, 1989

Gouache on paper, 15 x 20

Collection of Gilbert Cardenas and Deanna Rodriguez

*Cumpleaños de Lala y Tudi (Lala and Tudi's Birthday)*, 1989

Oil on canvas, 36 x 48

Collection of Paula Maciel-Benecke and Norbert Benecke

*Curandera (Faith Healer)*, 1989

Oil on linen mounted on wood, 24 x 32

The Mexican Museum, San Francisco

*Earache Treatment*, 1989

Oil on canvas, 17 x 15

Collection of the artist

*Empanadas (Turnovers)*, 1991

Gouache on paper, 20 x 28

Collection of Dr. Romeo F. Montalvo, Jr.

*Prickly Pear / A Little Piece of My Heart*, 1991

Oil and alkyd on canvas, 32 x 24

Collection of the artist

*Las Pachucas, Razor Blade 'do*, 1993

Alkyd on canvas, 24 x 32

Collection of the artist

*Nopalitos (Cacti)*, 1994

16-gauge laser-cut steel with powder coating, 32 x 26 1/8

Collection of the artist; courtesy Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, New York

*Persistence*, 1995

16 gauge laser-cut steel with powder coating, 32 x 24 1/2

Collection of the artist; courtesy Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, New York

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